

2008 Quail Season Outlook

By

*Doug Schoeling, Upland Game Biologist
Oklahoma Dept. of Wildlife Conservation*

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has conducted annual roadside surveys in August and October since 1990 to index quail populations across Oklahoma. Department employees run 83, 20-mile routes in all counties except Oklahoma and Tulsa. Some larger counties like Beaver, Ellis, Le Flore, McCurtain, Osage, Pittsburg, Pushmataha, and Roger Mills have two routes. The survey provides an index of annual population fluctuations. Observers count the number of quail observed and classify the size of young birds comprising broods to provide an index of quail abundance (number seen/20 mile route) and reproductive success. This report combines the August and October surveys to provide a composite index of quail abundance.

This summer's weather for the most part has been favorable for a good reproductive effort by quail. Sportsmen and landowners throughout the state have reported seeing more quail than they have the last couple of years. Because of the good reports from the field, expectations were that the survey would reflect an increase in quail from last year. However, the survey shows a decrease in quail numbers compared to last year and also compared to the long-term average. The quail population is still apparently in recovery mode from the drought experienced in 2006. In addition, above average summer rainfall in 2007 and 2008 has contributed to production of dense vegetation along roadsides, which may be negatively influencing quail observation rates on survey routes.

This is the 19th year of roadside surveys and the statewide index decreased 61% from the previous 18-yr average (Table 1). The 2008 statewide index decreased 20% from the 2007 index. Survey observations of quail in North-central, Northeast, Southwest, and South-central regions had an average increase of 13% from last year's survey (Figure 1). With last years near record low quail survey numbers, a rebound to near the long-term average was unlikely.

The Northwest region survey was expected to show increased numbers of quail observed. However, because panhandle survey routes were low due to extreme drought conditions for most of the summer, the overall Northwest region average declined from last years survey results.

Table 1. Average quail seen/20 mile route during the August & October roadside surveys.

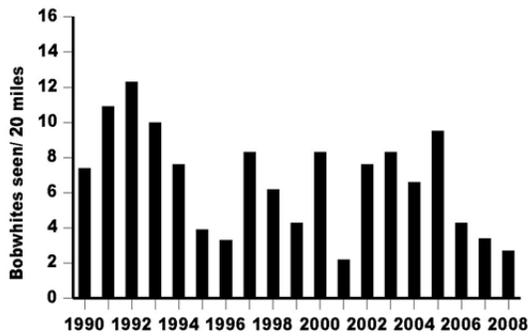
Region	Previous 18-yr. average	2007	2008
Statewide	6.9	3.4	2.7

Data from the October survey indicate quail had an extended nesting season. Thirty-two percent of the birds observed in October were not full grown, which is up from 30% seen last year. This is an increase for the second consecutive year since the number of young birds observed during the 2006 survey was only 16%.

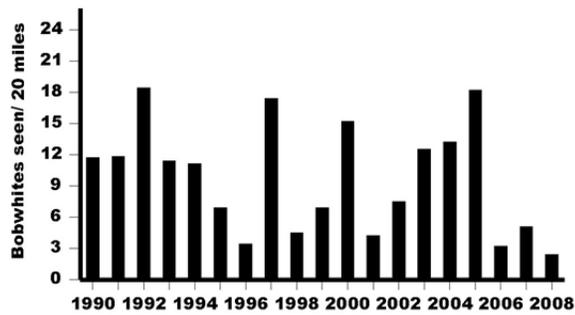
Northwest	10.0	5.1	2.4
North-central	3.6	1.2	1.4
Northeast	4.0	0.3	1.0
Southwest	14.6	10.0	10.7
South-central	2.8	0.8	1.1
Southeast	7.1	3.9	0.4

Despite the low survey results, reports from landowners and biologist in the field are encouraging that quail populations are improving across the state from a near record low population in 2007. The only way to be sure how the quail population fared this year in your area is to get out there and enjoy the outdoors with a good bird dog.

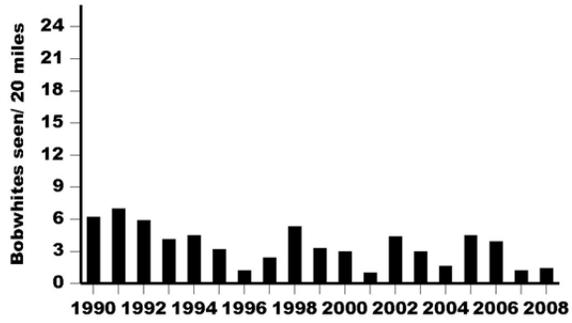
Statewide



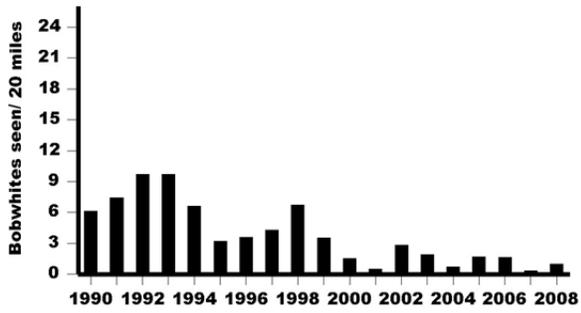
Northwest



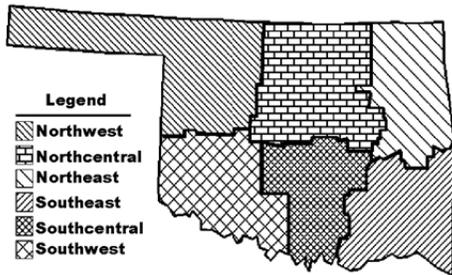
Northcentral



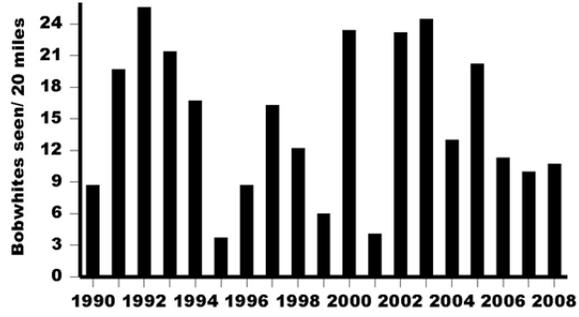
Northeast



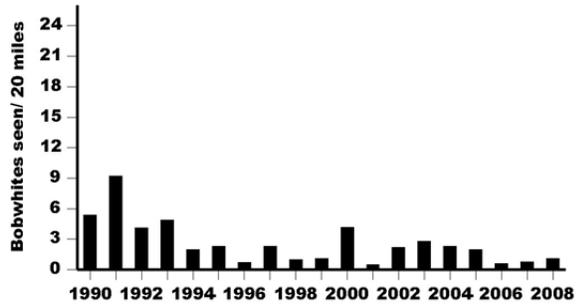
Regional boundaries for Oklahoma used for quail roadside surveys.



Southwest



Southcentral



Southeast

